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THINE ONLY SON

OR THE

STEWARDSHIP OF FAMILY LIFE

By

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HE HAD left his home in the heart of a great civilization. He had gone into a strange land to start life over again. He had tithed his gains; but the real test of Abraham's loyalty to his calling came later, after Isaac had opened the fountains of love in his father's heart.

The family is complete only in the child, the union of father and mother in one new creation—bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh—their own personalities projecting themselves in the composite personality in whom they are blended in indissoluble union. They are declared one flesh in the wedding ceremony; they become one flesh in reality first and only in the child. It is for this reason that "forever the Master sets the child in the midst as the symbol of His kingdom," since the child is the fulfilment of the sacrament of love and the bond of union of souls which have actually become one in him. "Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows in the hand of a mighty man, so are the children of youth." (Psa. 127:3, 4).

Yes, Abraham loved Sarah, but great stretches of his nature were like a desert

waste till Isaac came. Then he knew, but not till then, what life could mean—what enlargement of heart, what expansion of outlook, what fear and hope. Ask a mother what is the sweetest music she ever heard, and she will answer: "The first cry of my first born." And here in a letter to his own mother is a young father's account: "It was splendidly done, and in an incredibly short time there was that bursting into new life with a cry that spelled success. When his mother waked, I whispered to her that a son had come, and she, of course, bless her, just closed her tired eyes and wept for the joy of her first born. And so did I. That was about all there was to it. When things were all straightened up and for one fleeting moment we three were left alone in the room, I knelt by the bed and gave him back to the Lord, and thanked Him for his fine strong body, and for his safe arrival, and asked that he might be used always for His glory, and of course we had to cry a little more, as the indescribable little grunts and gurgles came from under the little blue blanket in the basket. At ten-thirty I came back into the city. All the kindling ecstacies of pride and happiness made me fairly burst as I came along; . . . the old man who carries water for us straightened up as he passed, and there was a genuine twinkle in his old cross-eyes as he offered his congratulations."

God's gifts are manifold, but the best of them all is the child, in whom He perpetually renews the life of the world, keeping it young, and in whom He keeps love's fountains full flowing, fresh and clean.

Now it follows from all this that the Christian demand is never met until all the family and all its life and interests are surrendered to God.

A pastor on reaching home after the Sunday morning service was met in the hallway by his daughter in the full freshness and beauty of young womanhood. She said:

"Father, I was much impressed by your prayer for missionary recruits this morning, and my heart said, why shouldn't I go?"

"But I didn't mean you, my child!"

It was not until he had escaped to the solitude of his study that he realized that he had not really meant anybody because he had not meant his own daughter!

It was not easy for Abraham to break up housekeeping and business in Ur of the Chaldees, and strike out anew in a strange city; but he did it. It was not easy for him to divide his spoils with a strange king; but he did. But the command to offer his son—"thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest"—fell like a sledge hammer on his heart. Yet the record bears no trace of hesitation on his part; no word of a sleepless night, or

of anguished writhing in the terrible dilemma of disobeying God or disbelieving his promise concerning this son. No; the record says quite simply that he arose in the morning and set out on the journey. And when they reached the foot of the hill where the Son of God will one day furnish the final demonstration of love that withholds nothing, the son, innocent of all knowledge of the meaning of their errand, breaks their long silence with "Father, here is wood and fire; but where is the lamb for the offering?"

The father bit his lips and choked back his sobs and said, "God will provide a lamb for the offering, my son." "Behold the Lamb of God"—his own Son—"that taketh away the sin of the world!"

And because Abraham withheld not his son he is entitled to be called the Friend of God.

So it is that family life reaches its consummation when our children, given to God, are given back to us with the halo of usefulness in the kingdom on their heads.

But we reach this mount Moriah by stages, often slow and painful. We begin with casual gifts of money, the loose change in our pockets. Then we write a check in the more deliberate conviction that missions deserve to be supported. Then we set apart a definite portion of income, thus acknowledging a relationship to God in our business, and tak-

ing, as Lacordaire said, the high road to Christian disentanglement of heart. Then we give our time in personal service, attend conferences, join study groups on missions. "But do not ask me to give my child!" Then you mean you cannot complete the Moriah journey?

A hundred years ago a successful young physician went home from the death bed of a little child in New York with a pain in his heart for the millions of children in India sick and dying with no physician to help them. His wife promptly shared the purpose which began to take shape in his mind. But when he told his father about it, that good soul said, "Never!" A month later the son heard his father's ultimatum: "The day you go to India, I disinherit you as my son." John Scudder went to India; and not long ago (1918) some one made a count of the years he and his children have given to India, and found that there were a thousand years of missionary service in his loins when over his father's refusal and protests he went to India to heal the distresses of the poor in the name of Jesus.

To our children God says, "Son, daughter, give me thy heart and thy life." To us who are parents He says, "Give me thy child." "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest. . . . and get thee into the land of Moriah and offer him there for a burnt-offering." We must be

brave enough to tell ourselves plainly that it is not love of our children but selfishness which interposes our self-will between them and the will of God for their lives.

What happens to family life and love when they are subordinated to the will of God and love of His kingdom? We shall find the answer to this question in two sayings of our Lord. In Luke 14:25, He enjoins the subordination of family love —the love of parents, children, brothers, sisters—and in Matthew 12:49 He tells us that for those who do the will of God family relationships are transfigured by being lifted up and embraced in the heavenly household in which God is Father and himself is the Elder Brother. In which case parents and children find their highest happiness in a comradeship of service where both are equally obedient to the holy and gracious will of God.

"Now I know that thou fearest God seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me." (Gen. 22:12.)

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